

Forum

Modern Orthodoxy and the Role of Science

Yitzchok Adlerstein, Bernard Fryshman, Baruch Brody,
Nathan Aviezer and Asher Benzion Buchman

In Hakerah, volume 17 a pair of articles by Nathan Aviezer and Baruch Brody discussed the interaction of Torah and science. While Aviezer's article dealt with Hazer's pronouncements regarding scientific matters, Brody's article defined Modern Orthodoxy in relation to scientific and cultural advancements brought on by the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, etc. Both articles generated considerable interest and discussion. In this forum we present reactions to these two articles, the authors' responses and closing words by our editor, Asher Benzion Buchman.

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein on: *Modern Orthodoxy: A Philosophical Perspective*

A treasured anecdote of 20th-century Americana highlights the pitfalls of fuzzy definitions of group affiliation. Red Levine, the notorious hit man for Murder Incorporated, was identified as an observant Jew. Asked how he could possibly be orthodox and work as a gun-for-hire, Levine reportedly¹ responded, “I ain’t never whacked nobody on Shabbos.”

Dr. Baruch Brody’s new definition of Modern Orthodoxy (*Hakerah*, Volume 17) could not be more different from Levine’s. Brody’s is laden with critical thinking—and won’t hurt anyone. Like Levine’s, however, Dr. Brody’s definition is not likely to pass the taste test, neither with people inside nor outside of Modern Orthodoxy.

Dr. Brody attributes some of the vaunted shift to the right to the lack of a clear statement of principles of Modern Orthodoxy. You cannot pass on an ideology to others, he tells us, when it hasn’t quite figured itself out. Dr. Brody thinks that there is not too much confusion about the “orthodoxy” term. It is modernity that needs definition, and he offers one based

¹ I have not been able to find any verification of this exchange. In fact, several sources have it that when it was necessary for him to kill on Shabbat, Levine was careful to first *daven* with a *tallit*. My version may reflect a different point in his career. Or it may be another example of what Rabbi Berel Wein calls true stories that just haven’t happened yet.

on twelve landmark positions and achievements that grew out of five key events of the past few centuries. Modern Orthodoxy Jews are those who embrace modernity—to wit, those positions that have emerged to distinguish our times from those of the past. Modern Orthodox Jews accept these notions, while haredim, he assumes, reject them. Brody fleshes out each of these values, and why MO should look kindly upon each one. I could imagine that this list might someday become the Brody Test of progressive thinking, scoring people on a scale of zero to twelve.

Other contributors will likely weigh and analyze each of these values. I will content myself with one, overarching objection. Brody's embrace of modernity is conclusory. He offers no argument to accept those values other than that they are...modern.

Will this work for others? More importantly, will it work for those to whom he wishes to bequeath these values as their hashkafic patrimony? Dr. Brody may feel in his bones that the values of modernity are positive and ennobling. But is that feeling a sufficient basis for a Torah movement? Why these values? How many other values in human civilization have come and gone? A German proverb has it that "he who is wedded to modernity will soon become a widower." Today's modernity is tomorrow's eight-track. Will Modern Orthodoxy Jews need to accept whatever it is that their enlightened neighbors believe in a half-century from now, simply because some new notions will have become accepted as part of Modernity 2.0?

For centuries, Jews excelled in resisting the temptation to go with the flow, including (and perhaps especially) in the realm of ideas. Many of them did so without batting down everything that looked new or different. They isolated criteria and tools with which to critically accept some new ideas while resisting others. As our Sages had pithily described it, they discarded the chaff and retained the kernels.

Dr. Brody offers a program that is hardly compelling—with the exception of the all-important proviso that categorically rejects any position that runs afoul of halachic requirements. Surely, though, there is more to determining what could or should be part of the mind-set of an Orthodox (in contradistinction to Orthoprax) Jew than violating some *issur* or other.

He is sensitive to this. He assures us that he does not mean to embrace "whatever values are fashionable at the current moment in 'advanced circles.'" Rather, he tells us, he means "the values embodied in the major events that shaped the development of the modern outlook."

He does not tell us, however, just why those major events ought to be the touchstone of modern enlightenment. Is it because they were embraced by a greater number of people? Or is it because these events by

now have considerable history backing them up, and have passed the test of time? Is either of these arguments persuasive?

More importantly, the twelve values that are born of the five events he isolates can themselves be understood in different ways. We are left with little more than his own preferences (often expressed as a need to distance us from presumed haredi values and practices) in deciding what the take-away values ought to be. We are reminded of the treasure store discovered in the “penumbra” of the Constitution, in which some of our loose-constructionist Justices have discovered all sorts of rights.

Dr. Brody tells us, for example, that a great event (the Protestant Reformation) bequeathed to us “the value of individual conscience in interpreting G-d’s law.” The Orthodox value derived from this, he tells us, is that “Modern Orthodox Jews should consult sacred texts to find answers to their questions. To the extent that they feel the need, they should consult the experts on the texts....The common strategy of adopting a single expert authority as one’s authority and following their views in all cases seems to me to be an abdication of individual responsibility.” While that is what it seems to Dr. Brody, to me it seems that failure to appreciate the value of greater *talmidei chachamim* runs afoul of many passages in Shas and *poskim*, and is therefore an abdication of individual responsibility to heed the advice of Chazal! In effect, advancing his “seems to me” in place of other possible interpretations runs afoul of another great value of the Reformation. That event sounded the death knell of the Magisterium; Dr. Brody’s understanding of what we ought to learn from history amounts to creating a magisterium of his own.


Another event—the Renaissance—suggests to Dr. Brody “the value of human worth and dignity and human individuality.” And this is but one small step away (by invoking Kant) from discovering the dignity of obligation, and then castigating Israeli haredim for accepting poverty while asking for government support. His objection, though, is not Yair Lapid’s *shivyon ha-netel* appeal to fairness, but that in living this way, haredim are “violating their own human dignity.” Many haredim, however, would counter that for a Jew to deny himself the opportunity to engage Torah texts for most of one’s waking hours is itself a dereliction of (Jewish) human responsibility, and an assault on Jewish dignity. Whose interpretation ought we to follow? On whose authority?

According to Dr. Brody, the Great Revolutions left us with “the principle of fundamental human rights held equally by all.” One of those more-recently discovered rights, in the view of millions of our fellow citizens, is free opportunity of sexual expression. Should this mean that Modern Orthodoxy ought to revisit the late lamented suggestion of a few

decades ago that all unmarried girls past the age of menarche be encouraged to visit the mikvah each month so that they can remove the “halachic barrier” to such sexual expression?

Putting all of this together, most of us have become accustomed (and that is a good thing!) to wanting firm evidence that a Torah value emanates from Torah itself, rather than from elsewhere. To be sure, different—and sometimes competing—values can lay claim to different sources in Chazal, and different champions in the centuries of rabbinic literature that followed. Yet, some values can muster voluminous support, while others can make only feeble attempts to do so, if at all, and only by assuming source-texts that are infinitely malleable and elastic. To many of us, the amount of support an idea has in the totality of our tradition is hugely important, if not dispositive.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch summed up much of his methodology in explaining mitzvos in the phrase Judaism *aus sich selber heraus*, a Judaism that emerges inexorably from its own sources. He insisted on accepting only such explanations that grew organically from the entire corpus of halacha, including its details. He also famously wrote that *kovato itim le-Torah* should be understood as “Did you set the values of the time to the Torah, or did you make the Torah fit into the times?” Applied to our question, this would translate as “Did you make your modern values submit to the scrutiny and limitation of the Torah, or did you insist that the Torah conform to your modern values?”

This is still the better way to go, both for defining the goals of Modern Orthodoxy, and for leading it forward in unsettled times. 

Dr. Bernard Fryshman on:

*Modern Orthodoxy: A Philosophical Perspective, and
Review Essay: Torah Chazal and Science*

While there is certainly a place for scholarly publications dealing with aspects of Jewish law and thought, whether these journals should publish in English is not so clear. One surmises that English is used because the editors (and the writers) want to reach a broader audience including those whose skills in Hebrew do not measure up to their intellectual capabilities and pursuits.

This presents both opportunity and risk. Opportunity, through the publication of historical or exploratory articles that educate, stimulate, and excite without challenge to *hashkofeh*. The current issue of *Hakirah* (Summer 2014) has several articles of this genre: “The Thick and Thin of the History of Matzah,” “A Quantitative and Grammatical Analysis of the

Shira Design” and “The Ashkenazi Custom Not to Slaughter Geese in Tevet or Shevat.” All are worth reading; all speak to a great deal of effort and thought by their authors, and to the best of my knowledge, none are likely to result in anyone’s *hashkofob* being affected adversely.

I cannot say the same for other articles in this journal, an inadequacy that exemplifies the risk (and damages) that can result from English-language publications accessible to the broad public. Consider the review of Rabbi Moshe Meiselman’s “Torah, Chazal, and Science” by Nathan Aviezer, a Professor of Physics and former Chairman of the Physics Department of Bar-Ilan University. Dr. Aviezer is the author of more than 140 scientific articles on solid-state physics and was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of London.

These titles mean something—in particular, that Dr. Aviezer is a far more prominent physicist than I (I too, have a Ph.D. in physics) and a more recognized authority than Rabbi Meiselman (who has a Ph.D. in Mathematics).

In his review, Dr. Aviezer mentions two other authors of books on Science and Torah and writes, “*These three books have a common theme, namely, that every word of Hazal was divinely inspired, and therefore, must be accepted by every Jew as absolutely true.*”

I too, believe this, and if there are statements of Hazal I don’t understand, I recognize that there are many things in life I don’t understand either. Rabbi Meiselman used examples to establish that ‘scientific theories become discarded and are replaced by new paradigms.’ Dr. Aviezer, on the other hand, takes a position that science is in fact, fixed. Rabbi Meiselman noted the fact that Einstein’s Relativity was challenged by a seeming case of neutrinos traveling faster than light. To which Dr. Aviezer responds that in the end, Relativity prevailed.

The salient fact that Dr. Aviezer seems to ignore is that scientists did entertain the possibility that Einstein was wrong. Evidently, scientists readily accept the possibility that experiment could show that Einstein’s relativity, like all other theories, could prove to be incomplete, if not wrong.

The same is true with respect to the Big Bang Theory relating to the purported origin of the universe. Dr. Aviezer says that “the scientific community is convinced that this is the only theory that provides the correct explanation for the origin of the universe.”

I submit that the ‘Big Bang Theory’ is only the best fit to the observations that we have, but by no means is this the end of investigation. People continue to explore, to propose, to question, to be puzzled. There are no absolute theories in science and I’m rather surprised that Dr. Aviezer seems to think so. Like Rabbi Meiselman, I believe that science

is imprecise and while our guesses are very good indeed, there are no absolute truths in science. There's absolute truth only in Torah.

The problem with *Hakira's* publishing Dr. Aviezer's review is that it stands unchallenged, in a journal published by Orthodox Jews of impeccable credentials. This volume will rest in Jewish homes and libraries, and like an undiscovered land mine, await interaction with some probing young mind—or curious reader who, unaware, could be harmed by this article. Dr. Aviezer's piece should have appeared with commentary by Rabbi Meiselman or someone else schooled in both religion and science. I will leave to others the question whether it should have been published at all.

The same issue has an article entitled *Modern Orthodoxy: A Philosophical Perspective* by Baruch A. Brody. It is important to report the author's background.

Baruch Brody is the Andrew Mellon Professor of Humanities in the Department of Philosophy at Rice University and the Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Medicine and Medical Ethics at Baylor College of Medicine. During the period 1985–2012, he also served as the Director of the Ethics Program at the Methodist Hospital in Houston, Texas. He has presented the result of his research both in bioethics and in philosophy in six original books and 105 peer-reviewed articles.

In recognition of his research efforts, Dr. Brody was elected to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Sciences in 2001 and was awarded Baylor's highest research honor, the Michael E DeBakey Research Award, in 2002. Also, he was the President of the Society for Health and Human Values and served on the Board of the American Philosophical Association.

There are few Orthodox Jews who have attained such stature in the secular world, and Dr. Brody seems quite aware of his accomplishments. Indeed, in addressing Modern Orthodoxy, Dr. Brody presents a prescriptive rather than a descriptive approach. If I understand his purpose, he is telling Modern Orthodox Jews that they are not 'just less observant Orthodox Jews,' but part of a movement for which he is going to construct a comprehensive philosophical framework.

I don't really believe there are too many people who, having read his piece, will rush out to join a Modern Orthodox Shul—but there is a danger that the outside world (including Government) will seize on "an ideology that makes philosophical sense as an ideal while fitting well with the practices and implicit beliefs of many Modern Orthodox Jews." Our practices and beliefs are going to face increased pressure in the future, and Dr. Brody's piece, while not so intentioned, could cause us untold grief. In a word, it should not have been published in, nor carry the imprimatur of, a traditional Orthodox journal.

The article itself makes some assertions that should not go unchallenged. Dr. Brody imaginatively frames his argument around the intellectual revolutions that form the Basis of Modern Civilization: The Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment all contribute defining values around which his thesis is built.

Having established his framework, Dr. Brody, I'm afraid, became captive to its implications. He writes, for example:

Finally, and perhaps most controversially, the values of modernity may lead one to say that certain laws, even those found in the Torah, were concessions to human frailties that should now be transcended.

Surely Dr. Brody is not suggesting a different edition of the Torah (R"l). But then what does he mean by "transcended"? Similarly, in affirming the dignity of human beings (an outcome of the 'Renaissance'), he writes:

To affirm the dignity of human beings is to believe that all human beings, as human beings, are entitled to be treated with basic respect (respect for their rights, of course, but also for their sensitivities and feelings).

I will leave it to the reader to match their רשעים of choice to Dr. Brody's philosophical standard.

Significantly, Dr. Brody seems to lose sight of his "treated with basic respect" edict when it comes to Chareidim in Israel. He writes,

When a Haredi member of Knesset recently remarked that Haredim have the right to be poor because they do not have gainful employment, but should receive ample governmental subsidies, he was, without realizing it, denigrating the dignity of those who follow that path.

and,

While acknowledging that much of the poverty is due to fathers engaged in full-time Torah study even after they have 5-6 children, there is no suggestion that the fathers go to work (and certainly no suggestion that they should have received a better education to prepare them for higher-earning jobs).

Dr. Brody means no disrespect but his words can certainly be read that way. In response I might point out that the careers, *parnassah*, and honor of all us University Professors are due to our success in the world of ideas. Would Dr. Brody not agree that the intellectual efforts of people sitting in yeshiva are no less valuable than our own, and worthy of the same kind of monetary rewards?

Dr. Brody's "better education" remarks are similarly incomplete. The critical-thinking outcomes and other transferable intellectual skills of a yeshiva education are at least equivalent to those acquired at a University. Indeed, whenever a door is open to our graduates, they swim to the top. The writer should place his *parnassah* arguments at the feet of those who erect artificial barriers that prevent Orthodox Jews from competing for certain positions and jobs.

Brody's "generous subsidies" remark also deserves a response. It comes with poor grace for secular and Modern Orthodox Jews to look down upon Israel's poor. The entire State of Israel, from its very first days, has been, in the words of a severe critic, "a great big *tzedakah pushka*." Israel has swallowed up the charity dollars of Jews everywhere for over a century, at an immense cost to the lives of Jewish people everywhere. Comments about 'charity to the Chareidi poor' come with very poor grace, indeed.

I am troubled too, by Dr. Brody's statement that "Modern Orthodoxy is both liberating and responsibility assigning." The average Orthodox Jew is not capable of "consulting sacred texts to find answers to questions." We are deeply engaged in learning and we aspire to understanding, but when it comes to *halacha l'maisa* we consult our rabbonim who are above us in knowledge and learning.

This is why the rabbis of the Modern Orthodox community looked to Rabbi Soloveitchik, זצ"ל in years past, and so many look to (*Yibadel L'Chaim*) Rabbi Herschel Schachter for guidance on issues that are beyond their own individual level of learning and understanding. Does Dr. Brody suggest that instead of looking for guidance, each individual Jew undertake choices of his own and take responsibility for things well beyond his level of learning?

Dr. Brody is far more certain about scientific "truths" than I am. I would simply ask what he plans to do with his philosophical construct when there is some observation or experimental evidence that is not consistent with 'Big Bang' cosmology and that directs people into some string theory formulation that is afield of 'Big Bang' cosmology? Is he advising his readers to reject a Torah perspective, which is based on absolute truth, in favor of the scientific picture of the day?

But these are minor details in the large philosophical scheme Dr. Brody lays out in the 36 pages allotted to him. Exhibiting imagination and erudition, he also identifies the conflicts his version of Modern Orthodoxy creates between Orthodoxy and its commitment to Modernity. In a section entitled "Conflicts and Possible Resolutions" he presents four strategies for approaching these conflicts.

Dr. Brody begins by identifying “Reject the implications of modernity” as one approach. But then he moves to “Reinterpret the teachings of tradition so that the conflict disappears” and two other approaches that are even worse. We take note of the fact that Dr. Brody tells us that “it is the strategies that are crucial, not necessarily my particular use of them.” So Dr. Brody is safe.

But nobody else is. We as a community will face challenges from secular authorities who will use the *Hakirah* article to call upon us to “invoke the diversity of traditional positions.” And young, impressionable, and unsophisticated Jews will read that “Earlier authorities, even Talmudic authorities, can be wrong about factual assumptions.”(!)

I hesitate to relate all the statements made in the guise of one ‘alternative’ or other that permeate the paper, none of which belong in *Hakirah*.

The relevant question for us is this: Why provide a forum for this piece and why did *Hakirah* allow it to appear unchallenged and uncorrected?

Finally, this issue of *Hakirah* contains an article by Moshe Maimon entitled “*Uncovering Mussar’s and Chassidus’ Divergent Approach toward Enlightenment.*” The article begins with a section entitled “Censored statements of *Ba’alei Mussar* on Enlightenment” and offers three lines that were modified out of countless untouched examples. The reader has little context for the changes and is left with no real understanding of the writer’s reason for presenting his discovery.

Similarly, the section entitled “Censored Statements of *Ba’alei Mussar* on Chassidus” describes two lines that have been altered, again with no clue as to what the context was for the change, and what the implications are for the article.

Later we are presented with a revelation that attitudes towards *Haskallah* taken by *Mussar* were much less confrontational than those used by Chassidus. In fact we read of “Maskilic Mussar tracts studied in Slabodka,” as if this adds to our understanding of the sociological and historical contexts of the strategies used to fight *Haskallah*. We Torah Jews will continue to believe that the Litvishe and Chassidic Gedolim who led their respective fights against *Haskallah* were acutely aware of what means to use in their respective parts of Europe.

What is most puzzling is the author’s contention that:

“When we ignore that historical context and try to refashion history in our own contemporary image, we lose the true appreciation of the valuable lessons to be learned, and these are lessons that have much to teach us, even today.”

I’m certain that there are those who found the “valuable lesson” to be learned, but I came away empty. If *וְיָרָא* we are ever faced with an intellectual challenge of the magnitude of the *Haskalah*, most of us will look

to the Gedolim of our time for guidance, rather than lessons we ourselves glean.

This article contains unintended but dangerous seeds, particularly for the more superficial among us. “Censored Statements,” “Disagreements between Mussar and Chassidus,” “Mussar Works written by Maskillim”—all sound like the 10-second sound bites used by tabloids to sell newspapers. Did *Hakirah* reflect on the impact this piece might have on the unsophisticated and unsuspecting?

A Torah journal has a very special role to play. I’m afraid *Hakirah* does not yet measure up. ❧

Dr. Baruch Brody responds:

General Remarks

Rabbi Adlerstein complains that I offer no arguments for accepting the values of modernity.

My essay was designed to discuss the synthesis of modernity and Orthodoxy, not to defend the values of modernity. Doing the latter, both philosophically and historically, would require a long treatise, which was not what I was writing. Let me briefly make three observations: (1) as I say in my essay (pp. 51-2), these values and their implications are for the most part clearly congruent with the teachings of the Torah. My essay focuses on resolving the apparent conflicts because it is they which challenge the synthesis I desire; (2) both historical experience and the progress resulting from the acceptance of these values have shown their validity. The recent barbaric behavior in segments of Islam who would return to a pre-modern ideology should remind us of what modernity has saved us from; (3) the validity of these values has been amply established by the powerful arguments that the great philosophers (Locke, Kant and Mill are three notable examples) have put forward in defending these values.

As I stated explicitly in my article (p, 34), the modernity I deem valuable is certainly not whatever is fashionable in “advanced” circles at a given moment. In fact, the fashionable world has now moved on to a post-modernist approach stressing perspectivalism and relativism, and I am certainly not advocating the acceptance of those ideas. I am discussing the synthesis of modernity as defined in my essay and Orthodoxy, not a synthesis of whatever is fashionable with Orthodoxy. So contrary to Rabbi Adlerstein’s predictions, I will not be advocating a Modernity 2.0.

My wife and I, with some good friends, have spent much of our lifetime helping to building an orthodox community (centering on a shul and

a school) that embodies just such values, and its stunning growth involving members who are *frum* from birth, who are *baalei teshuva*, and who are *geirei tzedek* is testimony to the attractiveness of this approach. That experience has made me more optimistic than Professor Fryshman about how these values can build strong orthodox communities. Remember: it was our community's high school students who created a great *kiddush Hashem* by their willingness to forfeit a chance to win the State Basketball Championship because they would not play on Shabbat.

Rabbi Adlerstein's quotation from Hirsch requires two responses: (1) too much has been made of Hirsch as the precursor of Modern Orthodoxy, and not enough of Hildesheimer and his seminary. It trained a large portion of the modern rabbis in Western Europe before the war, and its ideology was quite different and, I would suggest, much more attractive. I hope to address this point on another occasion; (2) as my essay made clear (p. 52), I certainly insist on evaluating the values of modernity from a Torah perspective. But in three ways that I try to define in my essay (pp. 35-6), the use of the values of modernity to help us better decide and understand what the Torah is teaching is sometimes very appropriate.

Specific Points

- (a) I specifically explain (p. 54) why modern Orthodoxy should reject this view of sexual libertarianism, so I don't understand Rabbi Adlerstein's worry about this point. On the other hand, the issue he raises about use of the mikva by unmarried women involves complex Halakhic, policy and pastoral concerns that lie beyond the scope of my essay and this response.
- (b) I use the issue of the creation as my illustration of the apparent conflict between science and the Torah. The real issue about creation is not big bang versus string theory versus oscillating universes. The real issue is that science has, since the geological revolution of the 18th century, provided powerful evidence that the earth (and even more so the universe) is far older than the traditional counting. So the question we have to face is which is more certain: that scientific truth or Prof. Fryshman's interpretation of what the Torah is teaching (which he modestly describes as "the absolute truths of the Torah"). Footnote 43 of my article offers support for my position from the Hazon Ish.
- (c) I accept the need for a system that chooses talented individuals and allows them to grow as Torah scholars, so that we have rabbis, *roshei yeshivot* and *poskim* for the next generation. These scholars-in-training deserve, as Prof. Fryshman suggests and I agree, far better material

support than they currently receive. And I make it clear (p. 40) that they should be consulted when questions extend beyond the knowledge of the ordinary layperson, so I don't understand Rabbi Adlerstein's concerns on this point. But these scholars often have well-known differences on many complex issues, so whom you consult often determines the answer you get. That is why there is no escaping personal responsibility.

- (d) My sources, in the Talmud and the Rambam, for rejecting the lifestyle of intense full-time Torah study for large portions of the community, are quoted in my article (pp. 38 and 66). I freely admit that I have little respect for those who advocate this path for most individuals, as opposed to the path of earn and learn, especially when it involves using political power to demand that others who are uninterested pay for this lifestyle. I am very unhappy about Prof. Fryshman's insinuation that I and other modern Orthodox Jews look down on Israel's poor; on the contrary, much of our charity goes to support them. But I oppose an approach that leads many to **choose** a life of poverty and then **demand** support.
- (e) My career and *parnassah* as a university professor begins with the hours I spend teaching undergraduates and graduate students. Something like this is true for most professors. My own career also involved other services I provided (e.g., running a 365-day, 24- hours-a-day consult service at a tertiary care hospital), and many other professors provide other types of services as part of their job. For the small percentage of professors whose career is also built on success in the world of ideas, this is due to research performed with the support of those who find their research valuable. This is very different from the career of the typical long-standing *kollel* student who does not contribute in these ways, so Prof. Fryshman's analogy is therefore very weak.
- (f) I agree that the analytical skills one acquires through intensive Torah study are at least as good, and perhaps even better, than the analytical skills acquired by most university students. Unfortunately, that is not enough for a large number of careers. They require years of study to acquire a specific knowledge base and career-specific skills. Having these are not, as Professor Fryshman suggests, "artificial barriers" to employment. The schools I went to were very yeshivish, but those who ran them understood this point and provided us with an outstanding secular elementary and secondary education and facilitated our attending university at night while we learned in the yeshiva during the day. I fear that this is not the pattern in many yeshivish schools today, even in America, and as recent proclamations attest, even less

so in Israel, where even minimal secular education is rejected by many gedolim.

One Final General Issue

Prof. Fryshman sees a journal of Orthodox ideas as a forum to publish ideas that have the imprimatur of certain traditional ways of thinking. Fortunately for our community, the editors of *Hakirah* understand the positive role of providing a forum for introducing discussions of controversial ideas. And Prof. Fryshman can hardly complain about these ideas appearing unchallenged and uncorrected, since the editors have provided him with a lot of space to challenge and correct, at least to his satisfaction, several of the articles, including mine. ☞

Dr. Nathan Aviezer responds:

The letter by Dr. Bernard Fryshman is important because it clearly indicates the pressing need for a journal like *Hakirah*. This journal plays a significant role in enabling the Torah community to move beyond the monolithic approach to Torah *hashkafa* presented in the letter.

The letter succinctly summarizes the twofold theme of Rav Meiselman's book:

(i) "Scientific theories become discarded and are replaced by new paradigms."

(ii) "Every word of *Hazal* was divinely inspired, including statements about science, and therefore, must be accepted by every Jew as absolutely true."

Since I totally disagreed with these two statements in my review article of Rav Meiselman's book, the letter characterizes my article as "an undiscovered land mine...resting in Jewish homes and libraries...awaiting interaction with some probing young mind who, unaware, could be harmed by this article." Pretty strong stuff!

I will begin with statement (i). Is it true that all scientific theories eventually become discarded and replaced by new paradigms? As the letter states, Rav Meiselman gives several examples in his book. However, the letter ignores the fact that I showed in my article that *every single example that appears in Rav Meiselman's book is incorrect*.

The letter mentions Einstein's theory of relativity: "Rav Meiselman noted that Einstein's Relativity was challenged by a seeming case of neutrinos traveling faster than light. To which Aviezer responds that in the end, Relativity prevailed."

Instead of noting that Rav Meiselman's example was incorrect, the letter claims that Aviezer was incorrect! "Aviezer seems to ignore that scientists did entertain the possibility that Einstein was wrong."

That statement is completely false. The scientific community did not entertain even for an instant the possibility that Einstein's theory of relativity was wrong. They all knew that Einstein's theory, one of the cornerstones of modern physics, was absolutely correct and that the experiment must be faulty. This soon proved to be the case, to no one's surprise.

Just how good is the track record of scientific theories? Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg has written that in his field of physics, "*in the last hundred years, not a single theory that had achieved scientific consensus later proved to be wrong*" (emphasis in original) (*Dreams of a Final Theory*, p. 102). Not a single one in 100 years! That's pretty impressive!

The letter asserts that "there are no *absolute truths* in science." This widely quoted cliché, while formally correct, is absolutely meaningless. For example, no one can prove that the force of gravity will continue to function tomorrow. However, *it is as close to absolute truth as one can imagine* that gravity will continue to function forever in our universe.

Now consider statement (ii): Was every word of *Hazal* about science divinely inspired? *Hazal* themselves have given a *negative* answer (Sanhedrin 11a):

"*Hazal* taught: Since the death of the last Prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachai, *ruach hakodesh* (Divine Inspiration) has departed from Israel."

And again (Sanhedrin 5b):

"Rav stated, 'I spent eighteen months with a shepherd in order to learn which blemish [on a firstborn animal] is permanent and which blemish is temporary.'"

If *Hazal's* knowledge of science was "divinely inspired," why did Rav have to spend 18 months learning with a shepherd to acquire the knowledge of zoology that is necessary to rule on matters of *halacha*?

Did the *Rishonim* think that *Hazal* had divine inspiration in matters of science? Rambam writes (*Guide for the Perplexed*, Part III, Chap. 14):

"Do not expect that everything that *Hazal* said concerning astronomical matters conforms to the way that things really are. At their time, mathematics was imperfect. *Hazal* did not speak as transmitters of sayings of the Prophets, but rather, because they were men of knowledge in these fields or because they heard these sayings from men of knowledge who lived in their times."

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, the leader of Orthodox Jewry in Germany in the late nineteenth century, was known for his vigorous opposition to any idea that deviated in the slightest from Torah *hashkafa*. Did Rav Hirsch think that *Hazal* had divine inspiration in matters of science? Rav Hirsch writes (*Trusting the Torah Sages*, Chap. 4):

“The first principle that every student of *Hazal* must keep before his eyes is the following: *Hazal* were the sages of G-d’s law. They did not especially master the natural sciences, geometry or astronomy, except insofar that they needed them for knowing and fulfilling the Torah. Their knowledge was not transmitted from Sinai...*Hazal* considered the wisdom of the gentile scholars equal to their own in the natural sciences. To determine who was right in areas where gentile scholars disagreed with their own knowledge, they did not rely on their tradition but on reason. Moreover, they respected the opinion of gentile scholars, admitting when the opinion of the latter seemed more correct than their own opinion.”

Thus, we see that *Hazal* themselves and Rambam and Rav Hirsch all agree that the scientific statements of *Hazal* reflect the knowledge of their day. When *Hazal* state (*Bechorot* 7b) that bats lay eggs, I do not hesitate to declare: “No! Bats do not lay eggs.”

What does this scientific mistake imply about the reliability of *Hazal*? Nothing! *Hazal*’s lack of modern scientific knowledge does not diminish in the slightest their greatness in matters of Torah. No one thinks that because *Hazal* were unaware of quantum field theory or dark matter, one need not accept their rulings in the realm of *halacha*. We live our lives according to the *halachic* rulings of *Hazal*.

Promoting this understanding of *Hazal* and Torah *hashkafa* justifies the existence of the important journal *Hakirah*.

The letter concludes with the following two sentences:

“A Torah journal has a very special role to play.” I totally *agree*.

“I’m afraid *Hakirah* does not yet measure up.” I totally *disagree*. ❧

Rabbi Asher Benzion Buchman, closing words:

Whereas I addressed Dr. Fryshman's similar objection to *Hakirah's* existence in *Hakirah* vol. 12 based on a quote from Rambam,² clearly my response did not convince him. Thus we are grateful to Dr. Aviezer and Dr. Brody, not only for their insights, but for coming to our defense. Yet I believe their responses will also be judged as unsatisfactory. But, since Dr. Fryshman feels that Rabbi Soloveitchik, ז"ל was a proper guide for Modern Orthodoxy, therefore *Hakirah's* Chairman, Heshey Zelcer, suggested that this quote from *Halakic Man* might be an acceptable source for our existence:

And this concept of the dialectic...give[s] the lie to the position that is prevalent nowadays in religious circles, whether in Protestant groups or in American Reform and Conservative Judaism, that the religious experience is of a very simple nature—that is, devoid of the spiritual tortuousness present in the secular cultural consciousness, of psychic upheavals, and of the pangs and torments that are inextricably connected with the development and refinement of man's spiritual personality. This popular ideology contends that the religious experience is tranquil and neatly ordered, tender and delicate; it is an enchanted stream for embittered souls and still water for troubled spirits... The advocates of religion wish to exploit the rebellious impulse against knowledge which surges from time to time in the soul of the man of culture, the yearning to be freed from the bonds of culture, that daughter of knowledge, which weighs heavy on man with its questions, doubts and problems, and the desire to escape from the turbulence of life to a magical, still, and quiet island and there to devote oneself to the ideal of naturalness and vitality... Therefore, the representatives of religious communities are inclined to portray religion, in a wealth of colors that dazzle the eye, as a poetic Arcadia, a realm of simplicity, wholeness and tranquility... The leap from the secular world to the religious world could not be simpler or easier. There is no need for a process of transition with all its torments and upheavals. A person can acquire spiritual tranquility in a single moment...

It would appear to me that there is no need to explain the self-evident falsity of this ideology. First, the entire Romantic aspiration to escape from the domain of knowledge, the rebellion against the authority of objective, scientific cognition... have brought complete chaos and human depravity to the world... The individual who frees

² See *Hakirah* 12.

himself from rational principle and who casts off the yoke of objective thought will in the end turn destructive and lay waste the entire created order. Therefore, it is preferable that religion should ally itself with the forces of clear, logical cognition, as uniquely exemplified in the scientific method, even though at times the two might clash with one another, rather than pledge its troth to beclouded, mysterious ideologies that grope in the dark corners of existence, unaided by the shining light of objective knowledge, and believe that they have penetrated to the secret core of the world...

Religion is not, at the outset, a refuge of grace and mercy for the despondent and desperate, an enchanted stream for crushed spirits, but a raging, clamorous torrent of man's consciousness with all its crises, pangs and torments...

Out of these torments there emerges a new understanding of the world, a powerful spiritual enthusiasm that shakes the very foundation of man's existence. He arises from the agonies, purged and refined, possessed of a pure heart and new spirit... (*Halakhic Man*, pp. 139–143, note 4.)


Yet I fear that even this explanation of the Rav will not be accepted by a large segment of the Orthodox community. In a preface to a letter (See Y.D. 150:8), the Chazon Ish writes, "It is difficult for me to argue with *Chachamim sheyichyu*, and I distance myself from it as much as possible, one reason being that this is my nature. And on the other hand, very little value comes of it, because the opinions (*deos*) of people are different. And the differences in these opinions are mostly because of fundamental premises."³ I have always found this statement depressing. Can minds not be changed? Yet he says "mostly"—and though *Hakirah's* audience is large, it still is a minority of the Orthodox world and it is for this minority, people from both sides of the Haredi/Modern Orthodox divide, who do not feel they have all the answers and who are searching for truth, that *Hakirah* is published. And, in this light, we are thankful for Rabbi Adlerstein's and Dr. Fryshman's thoughtful contributions to our efforts. It is important to us that we hear alternative viewpoints as we strive to be a forum for debating important issues relevant to the Orthodox community.

In fact I personally agree with Dr. Fryshman, that we should turn to *gedolei torah* like Rav Soloveitchik and of course Rambam for guidance.

³ אם אמנם מן הקושי הוא אצלי לבא במשא ומתן עם חכמים שיחיו, ואני מתרחק מזה כמה דאפשר, מצד אחד בטבעי, ומצד השני אין תועלת מצויה כי אין דעות בני אדם משתוות, ושינוי הדעות הם על הרוב בסיבות מוקדמות יסודיות.

With regard to the fallibility of *Hazal* in Science, Dr. Aviezer quotes Rambam, and I and many others do not understand why some refuse to accept what he says so clearly. The Torah does not teach science, man is capable of discovering its rules on his own. On the other hand with regard to Dr. Brody's stated quest for synthesis, I do believe that a quote from Rav Soloveitchik is relevant. "[T]here is no real synthesis in the world. If there is a contradiction between Torah and secular endeavor, then synthesis is not possible... In general, synthesis is very superficial. It is apologetic, it imitates others and the individual loses his uniqueness."⁴ As I quoted in my essay in the last *Hakirah*,⁵ Rambam writes,

Our religion differs as much from other religions for which there are alleged resemblances as a living man endowed with the faculty of reason is unlike a statue which is ever so well carved out of marble, wood, bronze or silver... Likewise a person ignorant of the secret meaning of Scripture and the deeper significance of the Law, would be led to believe that our religion has something in common with another if he makes a comparison between the two. ...If he could only fathom the inner intent of the law, then he would realize that the essence of the true divine religion lies in the deeper meaning of its positive and negative precepts, every one of which will aid man in his striving after perfection, and remove every impediment to the attainment of excellence. These commands will enable the throng and the elite to acquire moral and intellectual qualities, each according to his ability."⁶

As Dr. Aviezer explains, we have much we can learn from the scientific advancements of the secular world, but we are unlike any other people and the *mishpatim* and *chukim* of the Torah cannot be synthesized with any other system. 

⁴ Related by the Rav in his address to the Yeshiva University Rabbinic Alumni, Yeshiva University, March 1, 1956. See Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, "The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik," vol. 2, p. 230 (Ktav, 1999).

⁵ I was hurt that Dr. Fryshman did not single it out for praise.

⁶ *Iggeret Teman*. The Rambam's position accords very well with what Rabbi Adlerstein quotes from Rav Hirsch although Rav Hirsch differs with Rambam on some related issues.